



## **CALIFORNIA FALL FOLIAGE TAKES VISITORS OFF THE BEATEN TRACK**

Fall foliage is big business, just ask the New Englanders. In recent years, however, many visitors are discovering the tranquil Golden State during the fall months with its cool temperatures, secluded trails and scenic back roads to enjoy the festival of colors.

“Visitors can find their own stretch of road off major highways and interstates throughout California to see a variety of trees changing color,” said Caroline Beteta, executive director of the California Travel and Tourism Commission (CTTC). “Many of these spots have been local secrets – until now.”

In California fall foliage is synonymous with Plumas County. Located in the **Shasta Cascade Region**, this area offers some of the state’s most spectacular displays of colors amid rugged and rolling terrain. Many of the more popular trails can be found in the self-guided tour brochure *Fall Colors of Plumas County*, but some local residents simply head straight to the Volcanic Legacy Scenic Byway to get their fill of color. East of Lake Almanor and just west of Susanville on Highway 36 lies the Biz Johnson Rail Trail, which is perfect for hiking and biking while viewing the broad, open expanses of yellow and gold aspen. Visitors preferring red can drive on Highway 299 for the changing indigenous black oaks and white oaks. Combine your leaf peeping with bird

watching at the National Klamath Refuge, where an estimated two million ducks and geese migrate through the Basin each October and November surrounded by the oranges and reds of the tumbleweeds, bitterbrush and sage bush. New this year are free signs from the visitors bureau that read “Plumas County Leaf Peeper” to alert traffic to folks pulling over to look at fall foliage.

The **Inland Empire Region’s** Big Bear Lake mountain vistas are peppered with changing golden oaks, aspens and cottonwoods. Best spots for viewing include Mill Creek Road, Pine Knot Trail and Castle Rock Trail.

Word has it that local residents in St. Helena, part of the **San Francisco Bay Area Region**, escape to the back roads off Highway 128 near Lake Hennessey to explore the autumn colors by bike. Some take to the water as sailing and canoeing are permitted on this reservoir. Those traveling to Napa Valley wineries will enjoy the connecting road from Chiles and Pope Valley, where some of the state’s oldest oak trees can be found. Grapes aren’t just in your glass in Calistoga, where fall ambience is found in the changing grapevines along the natural hillside vistas best viewed by a morning hot air balloon ride.

It’s not just the surf that’s up in San Diego. The historic mining town of Julian, located in the **San Diego County Region**, offers colorful fall foliage at an elevation of 4,235 feet in the Cuyamaca Mountains. If the foliage doesn’t entice visitors, the homemade apple pies and cider at the Annual Julian Fall Apple Harvest, September 15 through November 15, will. Business travelers who are staying downtown and the county’s leisure travelers can also take part in the autumnal revelry with a quick walk through Balboa Park, which is within walking distance from downtown San Diego. The

Chinese Flame Trees, named for their showy, reddish seed capsules, at 50 feet tall are difficult to miss. It's a celebration of all things green at the Annual Garden Festival, October 29-30, at San Diego Wild Animal Park. Special seed bank and botanical tours are available, as well as expert talks about plants and demonstrations of plant care.

In Gilroy, part of the **Central Coast Region**, visitors turn east toward Redwood Retreat Road off Highway 152 to travel this picturesque fall route by horseback or even dirt bike. Bonfante Gardens Family Theme Park in Gilroy serves as the base camp for the Bonfante Harvest Ride, a 100-mile, 100k and 50k bike ride that meanders through fall colors on October 21. Guests at El Capitan Canyon, located just north of Santa Barbara, experience all beauty of the season. Fall foliage surrounds the luxury cabins and tents that line El Capitan Creek. Travelers can also rent free beach cruiser bikes to ride along the paths and trails that cross the canyon for a closer look at changing leaves.

Fall foliage in the desert means something unusual. In fact, it's a lawn phenomenon. In Palm Springs, part of the **Desert Region**, the Bermuda grass goes dormant in the fall and Winter Rye takes its place. It usually happens in late September or early October as area golf courses perform an annual ritual, known to locals as the "scalping of the lawns." Lawn mower blades are lowered and the grass is cut to the ground. A few days of no watering followed by the sprinkling of Winter Rye grass seeds and the resetting of sprinklers results in new grass that turns into Palm Springs' signature lush grounds.

Fall foliage in the **Central Valley Region** means one thing – citrus – oranges in particular. Each fall, Fresno offers the Fresno County Citrus and Fall Foliage Trail, where

visitors can explore agricultural splendor awash with changing foliage and lush orange groves. The tour is self-guided.

Summer might be the high season in the **High Sierra Region**, but it's around fall that the area really starts glowing. In Mammoth Lakes, the leaves begin to change in mid September. Some of the local hot spots for viewing include Rainbow Falls for its aspens and the Red Meadows area. The Highway 395 corridor through Bishop is also spectacular. The region's *Eastern High Sierra Fall Color Guide* details the most popular spots for viewing. In Yosemite, the golds, reds and oranges of the aspen, big-leaf maples and black oaks provide a stark contrast to the gray granite. Tenaya Lodge at Yosemite makes it easy to visit with weekday rooms 50 percent off summer season rates. Evergreen Lodge offers special fall packages, including guided trips, to explore Yosemite's little-known fall wonders, as well as more popular spots. Fall foliage is combined with history in Truckee when visitors take part in the Donner Party Hike, set for October 7-8. Many residents take to single tracks to see changing colors via a mountain bike ride. Tahoe Adventure Company, a guide service based in Tahoe City, takes visitors on some of the region's most secret trails.

Los Angeles foliage isn't immune to the changing seasons. The Urban Garden, located at the Frank Gehry-designed Walt Disney Concert Hall and part of the **Los Angeles County Region**, offers 45 blooming trees. The one-acre community garden is home to the Chinese Pistache, a 15-ton Delftware, rose-shaped fountain and perennials. Visitors take to the garden's path to stroll through the brilliantly colored trees and flowers.

Tour the changing colors by bike in Sonoma, located in the **North Coast Region**. The Lodge at Sonoma provides a “Sip, Cycle and Savor” package every fall, where guests spend their days leisurely pedaling to wineries or charging down area trails, returning to the property for spa treatments and a gourmet feast.

In the **Gold Country Region**, many motorists make the historic gold rush towns of Grass Valley and Nevada City their home base when exploring the colorful forests of the Sierra foothills along the 160-mile Yuba-Donner Scenic Byway, a looped route that follows Highways 49 and 89, Interstate 80 and Highway 20. In Calaveras County, hikers, bikers and motorists enjoy the changing oaks and aspens along the Highway 4 corridor. The Stanislaus National Forest, which encompasses 250,000 acres, offers changing oaks, evergreens and aspen groves. Placerville also makes viewing fall foliage easy with its Apple Hill Shuttle, which runs every weekend in the fall.

In the **Orange County Region**, the leaves may not be falling, but the prices are. Fall in Southern California means special offers and travel discounts. There are also a number of unique fall events, including the Tall Ships Festival in Dana Point, September 9-10.

For more information about the CTTC and for a free California vacation packet, go to [www.visitcalifornia.com](http://www.visitcalifornia.com) or call 800-862-2543 (domestic) or 916-444-4429 (international).

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